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FIRST SHIPMENT OF CONTAMINATED K BASINS DEBRIS SAFELY SHIPPED TO HANFORD'S CENTRAL PLATEAU

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has safely completed the first shipment of three tons of radioactively contaminated debris from Hanford's K Basins to the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility (ERDF) - located in the Central Plateau, near the middle of the Hanford Site.

The 14-mile shipment from the K Basins went smoothly and marked a successful partnership among DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Fluor Hanford, Inc. (FHI), and Bechtel Hanford, Inc. (BHI). The debris shipment is the result of a 1999 agreement bringing K-Basins cleanup under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, and under EPA regulation.

Larry Gadbois, EPA's K Basin Project Manager, said the shipment, "Represents the start of another important activity to clean up the river corridor. Movement of debris to ERDF is the first on-the-ground action that removes radioactive waste from the basins."

The K Basins are two indoor water basins near the Columbia River storing 2,100 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel, sludge, and debris. DOE will begin moving the spent fuel to a state-of-the-art storage facility -- also in Hanford's Central Plateau -- in November 2000. The ERDF is a massive disposal site for low-level solid waste generated from the cleanup of the Hanford Site.

The first shipment of K Basin debris sent to ERDF consisted of old fuel canisters and portions of the rack used to hold them, construction items contaminated during recent installations of spent fuel handling equipment, and other miscellaneous items.

DOE plans about one debris shipment per month from K Basins to ERDF for now, but expects the frequency to increase after major construction of fuel retrieval equipment begins in the second basin in 2001. Disposal amounts from the two basins are expected to increase from approximately 800 cubic meters in 2001 to nearly 1,000 cubic meters in 2003.

"This is a great partnership," said Phil Loscoe, Director of DOE's Office of Spent Nuclear Fuels. "We're

all focused on a single goal: getting radioactive spent fuel, sludge, debris, legacy waste, soil and water away from the Columbia River and to the Central Plateau for disposal or storage."

Earlier this year, BHI and FHI worked together to remove and dispose of nearly 80 tons of miscellaneous "legacy" waste from the K-East and K-West reactor facilities. Legacy wastes include spare parts, tools and other equipment brought from other facilities for storage or abandoned in place when the reactors closed.

To date, nearly 2.4 million tons of contaminated materials and soil along the Columbia River and other Hanford cleanup projects have been sent to ERDF for disposal. DOE and its contractors are restoring the Columbia River corridor by moving spent nuclear fuel, "cocooning" reactors, addressing waste sites and groundwater contamination, and disposing of aging and unneeded buildings.

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